



March 14, 2016

The Honorable Paul Krekorian
Los Angeles City Council
200 North Spring Street,
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Sidewalk Repair Policy (Council File 14-0163-S3)

Dear Councilmember Krekorian:

On behalf of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce (LA Chamber), which represents more than 1,650 organizations and 650,000 employees in the region, I am writing to thank you for moving ahead on a thoughtful Sidewalk Repair Policy. The Chamber would like to share our thoughts and make a few suggestions on the latest recommendations.

We support the effort to incentivize repairs for property owners that want their sidewalks repaired faster by instituting a 50% rebate program. A similar program previously instituted by the city was very successful, and allows the owner to option in to have the sidewalk in front of their property repaired in an expedited process by way of a third party. We understand that the rebate program would run for a limited time. Given the amount of sidewalk in Los Angeles and the number of people that would be interested in taking part of this program, we recommend that the program be made available for five years, and that the list of third party contractors allowed to make the repairs not be limited beyond who is qualified.

For owners that choose not to take part in the rebate program, we support prioritization and coordination for repair by type and not geographic area, as well as the implementation of a “repair and release” program. We welcome the inclusion of commercial and industrial properties in this proposal for a repair and release program. The previous proposal with non-residential property owners left out of the program placed an unfair burden on commercial businesses. The inclusion of commercial and industrial properties in the repair and release program sends a strong signal that businesses are an important part of Los Angeles’ fabric.

In regards to the repair and release program, we are concerned that a capped amount of sidewalk per property will be repaired. This creates a disadvantage to many more businesses than residents as certain industries like manufacturing unavoidably occupy large swaths of physical space as part of their operations. Properties should also not be capped in the amount of square footage of sidewalk that can be repaired if they wait for the city to repair it; they would be penalized for taking part in a program that is available to all properties.

As far as the warranty for repairs made by the city after it is released back to the property owner, a twenty-year warranty for residents but not for commercial or industrial makes sense for a city that has very segmented neighborhoods. Los Angeles however, contains many highly-trafficked streets with combined residential and commercial uses that will need repairs several times within that twenty year period. As we change the way we approach neighborhood uses in Los Angeles through re;code LA, the encouragement of mixed use development, and adaptive reuse, what will be considered residential and commercial sidewalk will change. We suggest that the warranty be applied equally across the board to residential and commercial properties.

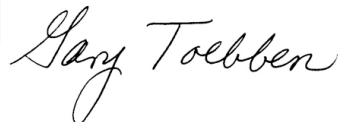
We understand the support for preserving the urban forest and the environment, and commend your offices for coming up with creative solutions to repair sidewalks. Preserving healthy and mature trees when possible and offering alternative materials for reconstructing sidewalks is proof that the city is committed to environmental preservation in a sensible manner. We appreciate giving property owners the responsibility for their choices in how to maintain the urban forest and the public right of way in front of their property. We fully support the exploration of easements to go around trees, their replacement when preservation is not possible, as well as releasing responsibility to owners if they choose to maintain a problematic tree. We also whole-heartedly support the use of alternative materials, but do not believe that the same warranty on work should be extended to these properties if the materials have a life-span shorter than what is generally used.

The Chamber also support the city in pursuing a public-private partnership to accelerate construction and repair. Alternative financing is a proven model that speeds up projects, usually at a cost-savings to local governments. Expediting delivery times from 30 years for repairs to 15 years for repairs would bring tangible results for Angelenos in their lifetimes, improving the appearance and quality of neighborhoods.

We thank the city in drafting a creative and innovative repair policy that will improve Los Angeles for the better. While we have outlined some concerns and suggestions for alternatives, we believe the city is on the right track and should continue to strive for an equitable policy that solves the problem in a timely manner. If you have any questions, please contact Alycia Witzling, Public Policy Manager at (213) 580-7531 or awitzling@lachamber.com.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Gary Toebben
President & CEO

CC: Councilmember Joe Buscaino
Councilmember Mike Bonin
Councilmember Nury Martinez
Mayor Eric Garcetti
Holly Wolcott, City Clerk
Miguel Santana, City Administrative Officer
Sharon Tso, Chief Legislative Analyst